

Presentation to Stratford City Council, Feb. 10, 2014 (by Dean Robinson)
Grand Trunk Railway Site Heritage Committee of the Stratford Perth Heritage Foundation

About three weeks ago we appeared before your Finance and Labour Relations sub-committee asking that it recommend a master plan of the "Cooper site" before a decision is made to demolish any or all of the former railway shops.

As we gather here tonight before a full council, our position has not changed. We think there needs to be a significant commemoration of what was once the industrial heartbeat of this city. Indeed, it's not a stretch to say that Stratford would not be the prosperous community it is today without its 100-or-so years as a Canadian railway centre.

For almost three years now, we have put forward a well-considered, practical way of creating that commemoration. Through a printed brochure, three presentations to this council, a number of speaking engagements, and half a dozen public information walks around the site (five members of this council have taken that walk), we have tried to explain just how important this site is.

Contrary to what some might believe, we have never called for maintaining the entire shops building. What we have proposed is retention of the first three most easterly bays on the building, in which a Grand Trunk or Canadian National railway steam locomotive could be on public display.

There have been two or three efforts, the last in 1988 when Ted Blowes was the mayor, to secure such a locomotive for Stratford. But all have fallen short, in part perhaps because there was no guarantee of a protected display area. We would not support the acquisition of such a locomotive if it could not be displayed in a protected environment.

But we continue to believe a locomotive on display in a part of the building where so many of them were serviced and repaired for so many years is commemoration worth pursuing.

Three bays of the erecting and machine shop would measure about 175 feet (north-south) and about 68 feet (east-west). That's between 11,000 and 12,000 square feet. It's an area large enough to accommodate a locomotive, but could also serve other groups or organizations, whose needs come to light in the creation of a master plan for the site.

Most important, however, the retention of three bays would stand as a reminder of just how much of a presence the shops had in this city.

With the addition of the annex in the late 1940s, Stratford became Canadian National's largest operation in this country. That fact, and others, have led consultants hired by the city to determine this property has heritage value. In his report of June 2012, Christopher Borgal says, "this site meets the criteria in whole or in part in all three categories" (p. 12) for determining cultural merit. He also says retention of some of the structural frames could be used for interpretation and commemoration. But how they are used, he adds, "would be subject to an appropriate master planning exercise." (p. 16)

We agree. A master plan should be the first step. And we want our commemoration proposal to be a part of that master plan. Let's *develop* a good idea, not throw it away. We urge you to view this structure as an opportunity, not an obstacle.

Thank you.